

## INTRODUCTION

The Northeast Domestic Fisheries Observer Program collects, maintains and distributes data for scientific and management purposes in the northwest Atlantic Ocean. The Program is a component of the Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC) of the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). In 2004, NEFOP trained and deployed approximately 100 observers, provided coverage on a variety of fisheries and completed approximately 8000 sea days.

The purpose of this guide is to provide NEFSC fisheries observers, as well as end users of NEFSC Observer Program data, with a detailed description of each data field collected. In addition to this manual, the NEFSC Fisheries Observer Program Biological Sampling Manual provides summaries and tables intended to enable observers to quickly determine the correct biological sampling protocols and methods while at sea. The NEFSC Fisheries Observer Program Training Manual is a textbook for observer trainees as well as a reference for experienced observers containing in-depth instructions on procedures and protocols relating to biological data collection as well as other aspects of the job, such as safety at sea.

This manual represents a revision of the data forms, collection procedures, and protocols described in the 1996 NEFSC Observer Program Manual. All figures contained in this version are from the 1996 edition unless otherwise noted. For documentation of other changes see Documentation of changes made to the NEFSC Fisheries Observer Program Manual, 2005.